GLB + T?: Gender/Sexuality Movements and Transgender Collective Identity (De)Constructions

K. L. Broad[1]

In the United States during the 1990s, there emerged a "new" form of collective political organizing and action around "transgender" identity. In this essay, the author depicts the dynamics of transgender activism during the mid-1990s based on original research in the form of a postmodern ethnography of transgender activism. Using data from field research, interviews, and observation, the author illustrates the way that "transgender" activism was characterized by simultaneous claims to a shared "transgender" quasi-ethnic identity and the complications thereof. In particular, the author details transgender social movement processes of identity—both processes of collective identity construction and deconstruction—demonstrating that transgender politics are not simply identity politics nor deconstructive (queer) politics. Using constructionist social movement literature, the author argues that in sexuality/gender studies we must expand our understanding of "identity politics" in order to understand the simultaneity of constructions and deconstructions of identity and gender/sexuality movements today.

KEY WORDS: transgender; identity politics; social movements; collective identity; deconstruction; GLBT.

Theoretical and political work in gender and sexuality studies has many times examined "transgender." Transgender experience has often been an object of consideration in various debates—debates about the category of woman in radical feminism (Raymond, 1980; 1996), debates about the construction of gender (Kessler and McKenna, 1978; Devor, 1989; Kessler, 1990), poststructural/postmodern feminist debates about gender performativity (Butler, 1990), and debates over queer politics in the Gay/Lesbian movement (Gamson, 1995). However, the mechanisms by which transgender experience is analyzed has been called to question. Dr. Sandy

[1]Department of Sociology, Center for Women's Studies and Gender Research, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611-7330; email: Kendal@soc.ufl.edu.

Stone (1991) explains that transsexual lives have been "captured" by a colonial discourse that proceeds with

> the initial fascination with the exotic, extending to professional investigators; denial of subjectivity and a lack of access to the dominant discourse; followed by a species of rehabilitation (p. 137).

Today, transgender activists and theorists suggest a "new" way to do transgender studies:

> It is time for us to write as experts on our own histories. For too long our light has been refracted through other people's prisms (Feinberg, 1996, p. xii).

> It is time we began producing our own theory, our own narrative (Wilchins, 1997, p. 25).

Simply stated, transgender activists and scholars are arguing that the study of transgender experience has been, and remains, political. Because transgender experience has been central to gender and sexuality studies and is also clearly being named as a subjugated knowledge, it is vitally important for gender/sexuality studies to consider "new" transgender narratives and politics.

LITERATURE REVIEW

> What I found was that most folks agree that political action on behalf of gender transgressors is necessary, but not too many people know exactly what kind of political action to take (Bornstein, 1998, p. 255).

Importantly, the 1990s marked a period where "transgender" activism in the U.S. emerged as something new, such that it became recognized as distinct from previous transsexual organizing and was increasingly thought of as a "young movement," in and of itself (Califia, 1997; Gamson, 1995, p. 601). As Leslie Feinberg (1992) explained early on in a pamphlet titled *Transgender Liberation: A Movement Whose Time as Come*:

> In recent years a community has begun to emerge that is sometimes referred to as the gender or transgender community. Within our community is a diverse group of people who define ourselves in many different ways. Transgendered people are demanding the right to choose our own self-definitions.

Central to this new type of organizing was a reconsideration of the meaning of transgender identity and strategies for action. Sandy Stone's (1991) "posttranssexual manifesto" explains the new ways identity were being conceived:

> I ask all of us to use the strength which brought us through the effort of restructuring identity, and which has also helped us to live in silence and denial, for a re-visioning of our lives. I know you feel that most of the work is behind you and that the price of invisibility is not great. But, although individual change is the foundation of all things, it is not the end of all things. Perhaps it's time to begin laying the groundwork for the next transformation (p. 14).

Stone was calling for a new type of "transsexual" politics that did not strive for transsexual acceptance (and disappearance) in traditional gender categories, but challenged the very categories of gender themselves. Others (e.g., Bornstein, 1994; Feinberg, 1996; Wilchins, 1997) began speaking of "transgender" politics in order to capture this new way of thinking about identity and politics among those who step beyond biologically-assigned gender from birth. As with any "new" type of social movement activity or conceptualization of identity, this shift was not uniformly accepted and actually was the source of a great deal of debate within and among various "transgender" (transsexual, cross dressing, intersexual) groups (Namaste, 1996). In other words, the transgender movement in the 1990s was characterized not by unity, but by debate and reconsideration of both transgender identity and politics.

Understanding this new "transgender" activism in relation to the gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender (GLBT) movement suggests that the debates and reconsiderations of identity are, in actuality, a contest over whether transgender politics are "identity politics." Rubin (1993) explains:

> Sexualities keep marching out of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual and on to the pages of social history. At present, several other groups are trying to emulate the successes of homosexuals. Bisexuals, sadomasochists, individuals who prefer cross-generational encounters, transsexuals, and transvestites are all in various states of community formation and identity acquisition (p. 18).

The way "transgender" is claimed as an umbrella term for all in the gender transgressive community certainly suggests that community and identity formation are central, as Rubin (1993) outlines. In other words, it appears that transgender politics may be just another form of identity politics. Transgender politics, however, has also been thought of as part of queer politics, where

> queerness in its most distinctive forms shakes the ground on which gay and lesbian politics has been built, taking apart the ideas of a "sexual minority" and a "gay community," indeed of "gay" and "lesbian" and even "man" and "woman" (Gamson 1995, p. 589).

Gamson's work assumes that it is transgender and bisexual inclusion under an "expanded queer umbrella" that destabilizes a cohesive gay/lesbian movement identity. In other words, social movement scholarship in gender and sexuality studies makes a distinction between a gay/lesbian ethnic identity politics and queer deconstructive politics, often highlighting transgender experience as an example of one or the other. Transgender politics has been sometimes assumed to be yet another example of identity politics "marching out of the DSM IV," and at other times classified as the marker of an emergent queer politics. To clarify what type of transgender politics is being done, this article examines the processes by which transgender activists and groups engage identity in social movement activity.

Social movement literature in gender and sexuality studies suggests two general ways U.S. transgender politics might engage identity. If we assume that the emerging "transgender" movement is an example of identity politics, we can

assume that processes for reclaiming a stigmatized identity and forming a shared sense of identity will resonate (Bristow and Wilson, 1993; Califia, 1997; Gamson, 1995; Taylor and Whittier, 1992). In this scenario, transgender activists would focus on developing a shared sense of "transgender" identity that drives transgender collective action. In the words of Gamson (1995), it would mean that transgender activists had an interest in establishing an ethnic/essentialist politic through identity-building strategies. Taylor and Whittier (1992) explain these identity-building strategies as processes for constructing a collective identity that include the creation of a shared consciousness, the establishment of in-group/out-group boundaries, and the negotiation of this identity in everyday life. In their work, Taylor and Whittier (1992) explain the emergence of a lesbian-feminist identity through processes of forming a lesbian feminist consciousness, boundaries of who was a lesbian feminist and who was not, and the negotiation of being a lesbian feminist in everyday life. According to this perspective, transgender politics would be understood in terms of forming and creating a shared collective identity, a transgender "we," if you will.

Social movement literature examining the politics of sexuality in the U.S., however, also suggests that a very different set of identity processes may be in play in this new form of transgender activism. If transgender politics is resisting an ethnic identity politics, our understandings of sexuality movements would suggest that a queer politics with strategies of deconstruction might dominate (Gamson, 1995; Stein, 1992). According to Stein, gone would be a culturally and ideologically unified community, and instead we would see a movement that "consists of a series of projects, often wildly disparate in approach, many of which incorporate radical and progressive elements" (Stein, 1992, p. 544). The identity work in these movements would consist of what Gamson (1995) terms "identity-blurring" processes of deconstruction, rather than engaging in "identity-building" strategies of constructing collective identity. Deconstructive processes, according to Gamson (1995, p. 590), both "disrupt categories" of identity and refuse (rather than embrace) ethnic minority status. To do so, activists assert an "in-your-face difference" by reveling in outsider status and engage in border skirmishes over membership conditions and group boundaries (Gamson, 1995). If we understand the "new" transgender politics of the 1990s in queer terms, processes of decentering and disrupting identity, rather than constructing a shared, group identity, should predominate.

Recent work in U.S. transgender politics and identity suggests some insight about how transgender identity is conceived and politicized today. Gagne et al. (1997) show that those who identify as male-to-female transgenderists reinforce and reify the system of gender despite their belief that they are challenging it. As well, Gagne and Tewksbury (1998) show that transgendered individuals challenge and destabilize the binary system of gender, while simultaneously and inadvertently reinforcing it as an institution. Although Gagne et al. (1997) and Gagne and Tewksbury (1998) are focusing on individual transgender(ist) identity (as opposed to collective identity in social movements), their research suggests an interplay

between processes of embracing and defying identity. Califia's (1997) work on the "politics of transgenderism" ends with anticipation of a possible interesting overlap of both identity claims and complications. Califia suggests that

> the differences between old and new styles of transsexual activism are fiercely felt in that nascent movement. Sadly, there is a strong possibility that the transgendered movement will be embroiled in identity issues like lesbian feminism in the seventies and eighties (p. 273).

Califia (1997) supposes that transgender politics may progress through a similar evolution from identity-embracing politics to identity-deconstructive politics. In the end, Califia notes a growing influence of "queer" deconstructive identity strategies in transgender politics and questions its viability given her sense that group identity formation is still vitally important. In other words, like Gagne et al. (1997), Califia saw transgender community in the mid-1990s characterized by tensions between identity and anti-identity claims. Clearly, the scant literature examining transgender identity and politics suggests that both identity-producing and deconstructive strategies may be born out in transgender politics.

Indeed, relying upon primary research of transgender activism, this article demonstrates that processes characteristic of an ethnic-identity politics *and* a queer-deconstructive politics resonated in transgender activisms in the mid-1990s. After summarizing my strategies for observing and understanding transgender activism during the mid-1990s, I begin by using Taylor and Whittier's (1992) framework for understanding processes of constructing collective identity to illustrate similar processes in transgender activism. I show that many in the transgender community were quite invested in adopting a transgender identity and consciousness, creating transgender group boundaries, and claiming that identity through everyday negotiations of it. After illustrating the strong dynamics for constructing a unified transgender collective identity, I illustrate more "identity" processes at work in transgender collective action—processes that dismantle and deconstruct that very sense of a shared transgender identity. Specifically, I show how transgender activists deconstruct "transgender" by disrupting group boundaries, destabilizing gender categories, and reveling in (rather than rebelling against) outsider status. In the end, this article shows how transgender politics in the mid-1990s cannot be simply assumed to be a "young movement" drifting through a similar progression from identity politics to deconstructive politics, nor can it be seen simply as disrupting feminism or gay/lesbian politics. Rather, I argue that we must see transgender activism as embodying the key concerns of politics and theory today—the complex commitment to and suspicion of identity. In the words of one transactivist at a political strategizing meeting at a national conference:

> So many movements fail because of a gap between the radical fringe and the normal mainstream people. We can do it differently (field notes, 1997).

This article illustrates how transgender activists in the United States did so in the 1990s.

METHODS

In the mid-late 1990s, separate groups of transsexuals, cross dressers, inter-sexuals, effeminate gay men, butch lesbians, transgenderists, and the like, started to define a transgender politics (Bornstein, 1994, 1998; Califia, 1997; Feinberg, 1996; Gamson, 1995; Stone, 1991; Wilchins, 1997). In so doing, many became very critical of previous (and especially scientific and "pseudo-objective") research on transgender experience (Bornstein, 1994; Califia, 1997; Feinberg, 1996; Stone, 1991), feminist critique (Feinberg, 1996; Stone, 1991; Wilchins, 1997), and gay/lesbian exclusivity (Stone, 1991; Wilchins, 1997). As a social scientist trying to study transgender activism, a feminist working in Women's Studies, and a self-identified lesbian, my position in relation to this research is centrally important. Furthermore, my gender bending and blending also was of central importance to my research relationship with the emerging transgender community. Because another aspect of the emerging transgender movement was (often volatile) debate over the very meaning of transgender (elaborated upon in the next section), my experience passing as a "boy" and wearing men's clothes sometimes marked me as transgender, while at other times my "failure" to take hormones marked me as *not* transgender. In other words, my very position (and people's perceptions of it) in relation to transgender politics and identity were ever-present and as much a part of the research process as the "participants." As such, I chose strategies for research that would acknowledge my complex relation to and within the research. I endeavored to understand transgender activism through postmodern ethnographic inquiry and ask that readers understand it as "situated" (in the United States, in the mid-1990s) and partial (characterized by my situated standpoint) (Haraway, 1988; Hartsock, 1987).

I began this research by contacting transgender authors and activists and asking their advice, reading transgender critiques of earlier research (including feminist and gay/lesbian research), and collecting community guides for doing research (e.g., "Suggested Rules for Non-Transsexuals Writing about Transsexuals, Transsexuality, Transsexualism or Trans——" by J. Hale, 1998). According to what transgender activists and community members were telling me and because I wanted to address the social production of knowledges (Fontana, 1994; Lemert, 1995; Seidman, 1994), I ultimately conducted this research as an ethnography (direct observation of the activity of members of a particular social group). Furthermore, I included ethnographic strategies that Fontana (1994) would call postmodern, in that they more carefully address the researcher's authority in creating "data" and constructing situated knowledge. In particular, I chose means to make transactivists as active as possible in the research (e.g., having them tell me when to take notes or which political strategizing meetings to attend), I purposely used Internet material (e.g., web pages, newsgroups) as "data," and I kept a focus and emphasis on trying to create partial and situated knowledge about

transactivism (rather than universal knowledge that would apply to all transgender activisms throughout time in different socio-political moments).

Following the logic of postmodern ethnographic inquiry, I used the following methods (tools) to understand transgender activism(s). I began by contacting 124 transgender support groups and organizations throughout the U.S. and requested information about their history, personnel, objectives and activities. Forty-two were found to be no longer in existence, and a total of 45 organizations (out of the remaining 72) responded. The documents from these organizations were treated as cases from which I did a comparative case study of organizations. Because transgender activists see the Internet as allowing formally isolated transgender people to join organizations and feel a sense of collectivity in addition to allowing for increased coalition efforts by a variety of different transgender organizations, I considered it an important place to observe transgender activism. As such, I did unobtrusive observation of transgender Internet newsgroups and web pages. By conducting observation of Internet communication, I also accessed what might be considered the "hyper-reality" of transgender life at the time. In addition, I conducted ethnographic research in one transgender community by conducting numerous interviews, focus groups, and taking extensive field notes (at support group meetings, informal social events, etc.). Additionally, I attended three major national transgender conferences and one local transgender conference, all of which served as political organizing and strategizing sessions. I participated in the various general conference happenings (keynote talks, dinners, social events, etc.) as well as specific session discussions about individual and collective identity, gender, and collective action. In all my field research, I conducted approximately 47 informal interviews with transgender people, leaders, and activists from throughout the nation.[2] In the end, my comparative case study analysis, observation of the Internet, observation at conferences and one transgender community all serve as components of a larger postmodern ethnographic inquiry of transgender activism(s) in the U.S. during the mid-1990s.

I need to make a quick note about confidentiality and my use of terms in this article. First, I want to explain that I maintain the confidentiality of transactivists throughout the research and in the discussion that follows. Even though many in the transgender community are choosing to live "out" transgender lives, especially transactivists, I distinguish between being "out" as an activist and agreeing to participate in research with confidentiality. While collecting data, I guaranteed confidentiality to those I interviewed. As well, at each conference I checked with conference organizers about being a researcher on the premises and guaranteed confidentiality. In this article, I maintain confidentiality in reporting the results by not naming transgender people, unless I am quoting from their published work

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[2]Because many of the conferences did not allow tape recorders and many individuals did not wish to have our conversations recorded, many of them were informal (recorded through my notetaking).

in widely accessible sources. Additionally, I do not name newsletters, unless they are available to the general public (through sales at a store or publication on the Internet). In this way, I have tried to guarantee the confidentiality that I promised to those who agreed to be a part of this work.

Finally, I want to briefly explain my use of terms in this work. Throughout the work, I will refer to "transgender" activism, but it should be noted that this is a contested term within various transcommunities. As well, I try to use terminology (e.g., FTM or transman)[3] commonly in use by those in the community. At times in this article, terms are included that are no longer preferred, but I include them here to be true to the historical specificity of when this research was done. Importantly, while in the United States there has been increased politicization of gender and more activism by transgender individuals, it is important to remember that not all transgender individuals see themselves as activist (Califia, 1997; Gagne et al., 1997). This work centers on those who are politicizing transgender experience and involved in transgender collective action, and as such, I refer to them as transactivists in my discussion below.

TRANSGENDER COLLECTIVE IDENTITY (DE)CONSTRUCTIONS

The most notable and consistent characteristic of U.S. transgender activism in the mid-1990s was the ongoing quarrel about the meaning and use of the term "transgender." Some argued that "transgender" was a term shortened from "trans-genderist," and signified those who change their gender but not their sex. Feinberg explains that, for many, the term was used "to draw a distinction between those who reassign the sex they were labeled at birth, and those of us whose gender expression is considered inappropriate for our sex" (Feinberg, 1996, pp. x–xi). Many transsexuals disagreed, however, arguing that to use the term "transgender" erases the very real experience of changing sex, not simply gender (Califia, 1997). Some expanded the definition of "transgender" to include anyone who does not fit into the standards of being a traditional man or woman. Yet, others disagreed, arguing that to be "transgender" is more than not fitting traditional definitions of masculinity and femininity—to be transgender is to face stigma and pathologized labels from the medical establishment. These distinctions about who fits under the umbrella "transgender" were reflected in transgender organizations: some male-to-female cross dressing groups embraced the term, others rejected it; some groups included drag queens, and others distinguished between drag and crossdressing as the "real" transgender expression; some argued that taking hormones qualified one to be transgender, others argued that it signified that you were transsexual

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[3]For those unfamiliar with the transgender community, "FTM" and "transman" are used to indicate "female-to-male" or "female-toward-male" experience (Cromwell, 1999, p. 28). Similarly, "MTF" and "transwoman" are often used to indicate "male-to-female" experience. "TV" is a common abbreviation for "transvestite," and "TS" is used to abbreviate "transsexual."

and not transgender; time and again FTM/transmen argued that their experience fit the definition, countering the notion that because society accepted tomboys and women wearing pants, the truer transgender expression was male-to-female; some argued that if you passed as a man or woman you were not transgender, while others argued that being able to live in a new gender is actually what qualified you as more transgender.

These debates over the meaning and scope of "transgender" are, I argue, central to understanding transactivism in the 1990s. I view these discussions and debates over the meaning and adoption of the term "transgender" as "identity talk" and "identity work" of an emerging transgender movement marked by notions of a unified identity and complications of it. Below, I demonstrate the way that transgender activisms were characterized by both identity-building (constructing transgender) and identity-blurring (deconstructing transgender) social processes. Notably, I do not view these as two separate "camps" within the broader transgender community, but two types of social movement processes that characterized the identity work of transactivism in the United States during the mid-1990s.

Constructing Transgender

Despite an acute understanding of the confines of "identity politics," a great deal of the everyday political work done by transactivists in the mid-1990s centered on creating a "transgender" group identity. Conference sessions, newsletters, casual conversations, Internet newsgroup discussions, support group chats, and transgender organizational documents often focused on defining what comprised a "transgender" identity, who was included, and how one acted it out. In many ways, one important aspect of a "new" transgender movement in the mid-1990s was the concerted effort to create a politicized *transgender* group identity.

In social movement language, the formation of a shared transgender group identity was the construction of a collective identity (a politicized social movement identity). Social movement scholars have identified collective identity as a key concept in differentiating "new" forms of collective action that depend on politicized group identities from class-based collective action (Gamson, 1995; Johnson et al, 1994; Melucci, 1995, 1996; Morris and Mueller, 1992; Mueller, 1992; Taylor and Whittier, 1992). In this work, the core assumption is that identity is an interactional accomplishment (Hunt et al, 1994). Freidman and McAdam (1992) describe collective identity as "a status—a set of attitudes, commitments, and rules for behavior—that those who assume the identity can be expected to subscribe to" (p. 157). Transgender rules for behavior, attitudes, and norms would be one way to observe transgender collective identity. Yet, central to the idea of collective identity is that it is constantly in flux and change, a "moving target," and constantly (re)negotiated as it is continuously constructed (Johnson et al, 1994; Klandermans, 1994; Melucci, 1995; Taylor and Whittier, 1992, 1995).

Melucci (1995) explains collective identity as "an interactive and shared definition produced by several individuals (or groups at a more complex level) and concerned with the orientations of action and the field of opportunities and constraints in which the actions take place" (p. 44). Therefore, the processes by which a transgender identity is politicized become central to our analysis. Taylor and Whittier's (1992) work details three processes by which collective identity is constructed: boundaries, consciousness, and negotiation. Here, I argue, that the processes apply well to transgender activism and understandings of the formation of transgender identity.

Transactivists in the mid-1990s clearly participated in processes of defining social boundaries distinguishing between who was transgender and who was not. Taylor and Whittier (1992) explain that "boundaries mark the social territories of group relations by highlighting differences between activists and the web of others in the contested social world" (p. 353). In their research, Taylor and Whittier detail the way that lesbian feminists claimed oppositional lesbian feminist identities. Similar dynamics can be observed among transactivists in the mid-1990s. Claims to a transgender identity were common among individuals and organizations. The following statements from Internet discussions and organizational documents illustrate the way that many were adopting the term "transgender":

> I have been transgendered all my life. As far back as I can remember, I loved the things associated with being female . . . . Sometime in the early eighties I contacted another transgender living in our state (transgender newsletter, 1996).

> There's this new word, transgender. Sounds a lot better than transvestite, especially bisexual male-to-female fetishistic transvestite. That's what I am . . . transgender (Internet newsgroup, 1996).

In addition to individual claims of a transgender identity, claims to an oppositional transgender identity were also evident in contests over who was *more* transgender.

Tensions existed between various sub-groups of the transgender community and were often characterized by debates about which type of cross-gender behavior comprised a truer transgender identity. The following interview and newsletter excerpts are examples of sub-group tensions that revolve around debate over who is more transgender:

> One big tension is when new transgender groups start and these butch lesbians come and complain about problems in the bathrooms. Then the other guys say something like "well, when you start to transition that will be easier . . . .," and the butch dykes get all defensive . . . saying things like, "I don't want to butcher my body" (interview, FTM/transman activist, 1996).

> [Name of person] isn't the only transsexual disillusioned with the "transgender movement" as she calls it. The newsgroups [names] were aflame for most of February and March when the two groups were (and some would say) "invaded" by transsexual absolutists. These absolutists claim there are only transvestites who are men and "true" post-op transsexuals who are women. A transgender is really just a transvestite playing at being a woman. Now I haven't been on the net that long, but I have been in one or two flame wars myself

and I've observed several, but the nasty mean-spirited rhetoric coming from both sides in this so-called debate could have stripped the epoxy paint off a ship's hull. At the heart of the . . . discussion was the absolutists' desire to create a new transsexual-only hierarchy. As in real wars, there was plenty of collateral damage. Anyone at all involved with transgender politics were fair game even though they were not directly involved in the postings (cross dressing newsletter 1996).

Arguments that FTM/transmen are more transgender than butch lesbians or transsexuals are more transgender than crossdressers typify the discussions in trans groups as they distinguished the group boundary of transgender. The debate centered on characteristics that mark who is in the in-group and who is in the out-group. By battling over who is more transgender, transactivists from a variety of different trans groups participated in the process of creating norms and regulations for what it means to be transgender and what experiences are shared. As one mid-western cross dressing transactivist explained in a 1996 letter to me, "We are often contentious, in disagreement, and rife with misunderstanding among ourselves. On the other hand, the transgender community does a great deal of networking and there is much coming together in attempts to cooperate in addressing our mutual issues."

Taylor and Whittier (1992) explain that lesbian feminists not only claimed an oppositional lesbian feminist identity, but also created separate institutions and developed a "women's culture" as means by which to strategically create boundaries. Similarly, transactivists create distinct transgender organizations. Often organizational documents, or letters from transactivists involved in these organizations, explain:

> [Name of organization] is made up of both TVs and TSs, with some members not really sure which one they come under. We seem to all feel that the term transgender better suites who we are as a whole (transgender newsletter, 1996).

> The initial purpose of the group was to offer a safe place for transgender folk to come and talk about issues regarding their being transgendered. It is a 12 step based discussion group to assist in shedding the negative behavior that society says we must show for being transgendered (i.e. guilt, shame, negative feelings about self, etc.) (organizational materials, MTF/transwoman group, 1996).

These organizational descriptions illustrate the adoption of "transgender" as a group identity. Notably, another way that organizations made claims to being transgender was by clarifying that they were *not* gay, lesbian, or bisexual (GLB) organizations. The following excerpt from a 1996 regional newsletter illustrates the way that transgender organizations typically distinguished between being gay/lesbian/bisexual versus transgender:

> We don't need gay/lesbian organizations to add "transgendered" to their names to make us legitimate, although it is nice recognition if they do. We exist as a cohesive (yet sometimes fractious) community apart from the gay and lesbian community. That alone makes us legitimate. What I believe is that we can and should work with gay/lesbian organizations, but not depend on them for any political clout because we're not going to earn any respect that way. It's like the old story about fish and fishing: Give me a fish and I'm fed for a day. Teach me to fish and I'm fed for the rest of my life. Which path do we take?

Whether it was organizations distinguishing themselves as uniquely transgender or individuals making a claim to belong to a transgender group, it is clear that processes of creating a "transgender" group category were common, and constructing a collective identity by creating boundaries was evident.

Taylor and Whittier (1992) are careful to explain that "boundaries locate persons as members of a group, but it is group consciousness that imparts a larger significance to a collectivity" (p. 355). Importantly, transactivists also engage in processes of developing a transgender group consciousness. The formation of a transgender consciousness was evident in organizational documents and transactivist writings about transgender subjective experience, shared interests, and opportunities (Taylor and Whittier, 1992). In general, the process of developing a transgender consciousness (in the mid-1990s) was observable in formal writings about "transgender rights" and "transgender oppression." In drafting position statements about "transgender oppression" (sometimes referred to as "gender oppression") and transgender rights, transactivists participated in a process of defining a transgender subjectivity, an understanding of transgender position in society, and a sense of transgender liberation. As Taylor and Whittier (1992) explain, "Consciousness not only provides socially and politically marginalized groups with an understanding of their structural position but establishes new expectations regarding treatment appropriate to their category" (p. 355). One example of this kind of transgender consciousness is the following excerpt from a "Bill of Gender Rights," written by a group of transgender lawyers and activists and posted on the International Bill of Gender Rights homepage in 1996:

A Bill of Gender Rights

It is time for the transgendered community to take a stand, a strong stand, against all gender-based discrimination simply because some people are different and simply because some people do not fit into current social norms of gender roles. It is time the gender-based community articulate this stand in words that clearly define exactly what our gender rights are. It is time to stand alongside other minority rights movements to declare these gender rights as follows:

The Right to Assume a Gender Role—Every human being has within themselves an idea of who they are and what they are capable of achieving. That identity and capability shall not be limited by a person's physical or genetic sex, nor by what any society may deem as "masculine" or "feminine" behavior. It is fundamental, then, that each individual has the right to assume gender roles congruent with one's self-perceived identity and capabilities, regardless of physical sex, genetic sex, or sex role. *Therefore, no person shall be denied their Human and/or Civil Rights on the basis that their gender role or perceived gender role is not congruent with their genetic sex, physical sex, or sex role . . .*

In addition, transgender rights were also articulated in organizational and transactivist discussions about the prioritizing of transgender collective action. As some transgender activists explained:

I would say the primary concern is Human Rights, and by that I mean employment, housing, public accommodation concerns. Loss of employment for those going through transition

is a major concern. Another concern is the fear of receiving and not receiving medical treatment . . . . Another concern is the ability to get your paperwork changed. It is still difficult to do . . . and nearly impossible in many cities. Also, related to medical issues is the worry over quality of TG/TS specific care. A lot of surgery results are poor. . . . Those are the primary issues, medical and legal concerns (interview, MTF/transwoman, 1996).

Major issues which the [name of group] will address include educating the public about who we are, ensuring the media portray us accurately and fairly, securing legal and civil rights, and increasing access to medical care for our specific needs (organizational materials, transgender group, 1996).

Whether speaking in terms of human rights or civil rights, transactivists call up a sense of a transgender group identity, with shared experiences of transgender oppression, through their actions on behalf of transgender medical and legal rights.

The final mechanism by which collective identity is constructed, according to Taylor and Whittier (1992), is through identity negotiation embedded in everyday life. They explain that activists strive to change the symbolic meanings of everyday life by politicizing identity and its expression. Such processes of everyday identity negotiation resonated in 1990s transgender politics, so much so that activists often spoke of wanting access to "everyday life." For example, while interviewing a key national transgender activist, I asked her what she thought were the key issues facing the transgender community, and she replied, "Well, I'd say that that depends on where you are talking about. Here in [name of place] the issues are therapeutic. But, I guess legal and medical concerns are important. Then there is the issue of access!" At this point, I asked for clarification, "Do you mean access to medical care?" She clarified, "*That* is a concern, but more so it is access to *everyday* life." Another transactivist explained in a 1997 speech at a national cross dressing conference, "this is what I'm talking about when I talk about transgender liberation. It is about our lives, being able to use bathrooms, go swimming, get coffee." Transactivists fight for access to the everyday by living their lives as transgender.

Everyday negotiations of a transgender self are also observable in the discussions about "appropriate" behavior. For example, the standard rule with many cross dressing groups is to dress "appropriately" when going out on the town, such that the presentation of a transgender collectivity leaves a good impression. The following guidelines for crossdressing events illustrate:

Dressing styles often vary from after 5 gowns to business suits. We recommend that no exotic garments be worn that would cause undue attention of hotel guests. We are trying to create a positive image of cross dressers (national cross dressing conference, 1997).

We only ask that members and their guests dress appropriately for the occasion. Don't effect bimbo glitz (unless you are a glitzy bimbo). Avoid looking slutty, unless you are a working tart. Be as elegant and feminine as you can or wish to be (southern cross dressing newsletter, 1996).

By making appeals to dress appropriately, these groups politicized the everyday presentation of a transgender self.

    Finally, negotiation of a transgender identity is perhaps most evident in discussions among transactivists about the public expression of a transgender identity—being "out." Statements in transgender newsletters and by transgender activists with whom I spoke reflect the way in which everyday expression of a transgender identity was politicized:

> I have been at the forefront of a revolution for the last few years . . . a revolution in how society perceives the transgendered and learns to better tolerate (if not accept) us. I consider myself a leader in this revolution, if for no other reason than my life is that of an openly transgendered person who makes no apologies for who and what she is (national transgender newsletter, 1996).

> Don't deny who you are. Accept whatever you are and be proud of yourself . . . . If you have strength within yourself, possibly if the time and situation arose to represent yourself honorably came, you could explain who you are. And if enough of us could do this . . . others might see . . . we're not so bad (cross dressing newsletter, 1996).

Further examples of negotiating a transgender identity by "coming out" can be seen in terms of transgender participation in gay pride parades, transgender people being out during transition on the job (while demanding the right to keep that job), and choosing to discuss their transgender identities on talk shows and in the media. Through negotiations of an "out" transgender identity, transactivists politicize everyday identity and, thus, further construct a transgender group identity.

    In sum, it is clear that the processes of constructing a collective identity, as outlined by Taylor and Whittier (1992), are observable in the activism of U.S. transactivists in the mid-1990s. Transactivists create transgender group boundaries by individual and group claims to transgender identity, articulate a transgender consciousness through expressions of transgender oppression and transgender rights, and negotiate transgender identity in everyday life. If one were to consider *only* these identity processes, it would seem that the "new" transgender politics in the United States during the 1990s were indeed just identity politics.

Deconstructing Transgender

> Don't imagine that there is only one trope of transsexuality, only one figure of "the" transsexual, or only one transsexual discourse at any one temporal and cultural location (Hale, 1998, Rule # 12 of *Suggested Rules for Non-Transsexuals Writing about Transsexuals, Transsexuality, Transsexualism, or Trans——*).

    Importantly, I have only told part of the story of transgender politics from the mid-1990s. It must be understood that transgender activism in the mid-1990s was as much about deconstructing a sense of a unified and shared transgender experience as it was about constructing one. Organizational documents, conference debates and speeches, informal conversations, Internet flame wars, and collective action in the mid-1990s also illustrated processes of deconstruction in transactivism. Rather than advocating for the right to change genders and be accepted,

some transactivists reveled in the idea of existing between and among both gender categories. Through deconstructive processes of destabilizing group boundaries, challenging binary categories, and reveling in labels of deviance, transactivists also sometimes complicated the very category of transgender that was being constructed. In other words, another important component of transgender politics was the very resistance to becoming *transgender* politics.

The deconstruction of a transgender identity can be understood through the literature on gender and sexuality movements. A growing body of work strives to explain the trend of queer activism, understood to have emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s. According to one account, a distinctive queer politics arose in April of 1990

> when a group in New York City met to discuss the bashings of lesbians and gay men in the East Village. Calling themselves Queer Nation, they retaliated with the slogan "Queers Bash Back." Appropriating a former term of shame, Queer Nation constructed a confrontational identity that put perversion in the public's face (Bristow and Wilson, 1993, p. 9).

While strong theoretical work suggests mechanisms of a queer resistance (e.g., Butler, 1990), the social movement processes characteristic of this new form of queer politics are still being identified in social movement research. Gamson's (1995) research on the emergence of queer activism in the gay and lesbian movement offers the clearest explanation of these social movement processes. In addition to confrontational style, Gamson explains that the opposing logic of queer activism involves blurring group boundaries and taking apart identity categories.

Although a significant amount of transactivism was characterized by processes of boundary construction (through claims to a shared transgender group identity), there also existed deconstructive processes of blurring group boundaries. Gamson describes the development of an expanded queer umbrella (that includes bisexual and transgender individuals in gay/lesbian politics) as a "politic of boundary disruption" in gay/lesbian politics. Some transactivists engaged a similar politic of disruption by seeking to expand the transgender umbrella. For example, Bornstein (1998) complicates the notion that there exists a specific transgender group experience distinct from everyone's experience of a world of binary gender by asserting, ". . . (Transgender) would include anyone whose physiology casts them as 'not men' or 'not women'" (p. 157). Wilchins (1996) also participates in deconstructive strategies by claiming "it's about the gender oppression which affects everyone: the college sweetheart who develops life-threatening anorexia nervosa trying to look 'feminine,' the Joe Sixpack dead at forty-five from cirrhosis of the liver because 'real men' are hard drinkers" (p. 68). At heart, both expand the "transgender" umbrella beyond simple distinctions of who is in the transgender in-group and who is in the dominant gender out-group. Rather than being claims to a minority group boundary, these claims highlight the very lack of a boundary because, as the logic goes, all gender behavior can be described as "transgender."

In blurring group boundaries, some transactivists also deconstruct categories of gender. The primary way that I observed destabilization of gender categories was through the classic deconstructive strategy of "being both and neither of the binary terms" (Collins, 1998, p. 277). This was evident in transactivism(s) in a variety of ways. Many transactivists spoke of not fitting traditional gender categories—being neither men nor women. For example, at conferences and in interviews, I often heard FTM/transmen explain that FTM/transmen are not like other men. This was sometimes expressed by reference to genitalia and bodies by simple statements such as:

> Not all men stand to pee (field notes, 1996).

> You can be female-bodied and a man (field notes, 1996).

Others argued that being a FTM/transman did not mean one had to deny the years of living as a woman, therefore again distinguishing between FTM/transmen and other men (who had not lived as women):

> I will never be a man in the same way that someone who was born as one is (field notes, 1996).

> I've been raised as a woman. I'm not going to be an ass like those genetic men. I know better (field notes, 1996).

> I'm sick of people saying that I get male privilege. I grew up female (interview, FTM/transman, 1996).

By claiming to be "men" who are not like other "men," some FTM/transmen complicate the binary category of gender.

Similarly, MTF/transwomen sometimes distinguish themselves as separate from "genetic women." Some MTF/transwomen with whom I spoke said:

> You can approximate a woman, but you will never be one. Women are second class citizens. My wife brought me into the world of women. I know that I can't have a baby and I don't have sex with men (interview, MTF/transwoman, 1997).

> The gay and lesbian community doesn't want the MTF/transwoman in the lesbian coming out group—and I took a long time to figure out what that was about—and what I learned was that lesbians could feel the male sexuality. We must remember that we (MTF/transwomen) have both (male and female sexuality) (field notes, 1997).

Like FTM/transmen, those MTF/transwomen that insist MTF/transwomen are not like all other women, complicate binary categories of gender by claiming to being neither women nor men.

Gender categories were destabilized not only through assertions of not fitting either gender, but also through claims to actually being a bit of both. It is this notion of *transgender*, meaning being both man and woman, that drives many in the gender community to hold up intersexuality as perhaps the best way to describe transgender existence. One transsexual activist explains, "You can't deny

the possibility of a complex gender when you are faced with someone who is intersexual." The idea is that by being transgender, one really embodies an "intersexual" identity of being both man and woman. As part of this trend, intersexuals are increasingly coming out and claiming an intersexual identity that was denied and erased by parents and doctors. For example, one person writing in the leading intersex newsletter explains:

> A new, second edition of John Money's 1968 *Sex Errors of the Body* was published earlier this year. If any of you are unfamiliar with Money's name, he is the principal architect of the medical dogma that intersexuality must be erased by any hormonal and surgical means available . . .. I beg to differ, Dr. Money. I was born whole and beautiful, but different. The error was not in my body, nor in my sex organs, but in the determination of the culture, carried out by physicians with my parents' permission, to erase my intersexuality. Sex errors is no less stigmatizing than defect or deficiency. Our path to healing lies in embracing our intersexual selves, not in labeling our bodies as having committed some "error" (1997).

In confronting the assumption that intersexuality is wrong, intersexuals challenge the notion that sex/gender is solely binary. Simply stated, to strive for recognition as *intersexual* is to strive for recognition that sex/gender is not binary in that one can, quite literally, exist as both boy *and* girl, woman *and* man.

The deconstructive strategy of claiming to be neither gender and also both is most clearly visible in the way that some transactivists are no longer advocating for the right to change from one gender to the other, so much as the right to stay in-between. For example, Nancy Nangeroni (1997) argues:

> Today, many transsexuals are choosing to change some elements of their physical sexuality without undergoing SRS [Sex Reassignment Surgery]. It's time our helping professionals took an active role in promoting transsexualism and transgenderism *without* SRS (p. 349).

One main way in which transgender activists advocate the "in-between" is by challenging the place of a very significant sex/gender signifier: the penis. Women with penises and men without penises, according to some transactivists, exist and have the right to do so (beyond simply as a source of entertainment). While there are many MTF/transwomen who are very clear about their desire for Sex-Reassignment-Surgery (SRS), there are growing numbers of people who are advocating a vision of womanhood that might include a penis. One person writing into a transgender newsgroup makes the observation:

> From what I've read, there appears to be a sizable percentage of the transgendered community that feel they should have been born women (and don't consider themselves to be transvestites) but would never consider having a sex change operation (Internet newsgroup, 1996).

Similar reconsiderations about the penis as a signifier of sex, and by extension gender, were happening among FTM/transmen as well. Typically, FTM/transmen expressed frustration with the medical profession for defining their masculinity in terms of having a penis, and having a large one at that. For example, a very

well known surgeon sharing pictures of penis construction results to a group of FTM/transmen stated, "In this operation, I always show the biggest, best results" (field notes, 1996). In contrast, one FTM/transman I interviewed explained, "the medical world just *has* to come to understand that FTM/transmen don't *want* a big penis." The struggle has been to have the medical profession realize the FTM/transman preference for options in "choosing" a penis appropriate to each man (and sometimes his partner). At a 1996 national FTM/transman conference, I heard many discussing penis options, with FTM/transmen comparing notes about surgery and hormones so that "men can choose the penis appropriate for them." By arguing that all penis sizes are legitimate, some FTM/transmen are arguing for recognition that gender is not reducible the genital criteria for identifying two "natural" sexes.

In Gamson's (1995) words, some transactivists are participating in "identity blurring" by complicating group boundaries and destabilizing dichotomous gender categories, such that it is not exactly a "transgender" identity politics being enacted. Finally, some "transgender" politics can be understood as a type of queer politics in that they are confrontational. Gamson (1995) explains, "'Queer' asserts in-your-face difference, with an edge of defiant separatism. 'We're here, we're queer, get used to it,' goes the chant" (p. 593). In transactivism, one of the defiant, in-your-face chants is, "We're not quiet. We're not well-behaved. And we're not going away." From Hermaphrodites with Attitude: "We're Here. We're queer. Stop cutting our goddamn bodies." Newsletter names like "Hermaphrodites with Attitude" and "in your face," in addition to organizational names like "Transsexual Menace," highlight the way that some transgender groups use similar tactics of appropriating a former term of shame (e.g., Queer Nation) in a confrontational manner.

Additionally, "Queer does not so much rebel against outsider status as revel in it" (Gamson 1995, p. 593). Reveling in transgender outsider status is most observable in some forms of political resistance enacted by transactivists. For example, one transgender newsletter reported:

> Over a dozen activists from the Transsexual Menace, Menace Men, TOPS, and ACT UP, demonstrated outside the national meeting of American Psychiatric Association, calling for an end to diagnosing transpeople as mentally disordered. . . . Activists handed out over 1,000 leaflets. . . . Others held signs saying, "Keep Your Laws OFF My Body," and "Gender Euphoria NOT Gender Dysphoria". . . (national transgender newsletter, 1996).

By reveling in gender euphoria, these transactivists are not striving to escape labels of deviance so much as embracing them. Toward the end of the 1990s, there emerged transactivists who created visual representation of transgender bodies, parodying a "freak show" by illustrating a person being both man and woman. Lauren Cameron's (1998) work, showing a series of pictures of his transition from woman to man are a classic example. In this work, Cameron confronts the viewer with his body and, it might be argued, revels in his outsider status.

Another FTM/transman explains the confrontational logic of presenting a naked FTM/transman body:

> . . . parading a naked intersexed body in public is a political act. An act that challenges the widespread conviction that sex and gender represent a binary system. So much is riding on the perpetuation of that myth. Distribution of property and wealth; access to power and knowledge; freedom to control our reproduction and our bodies; the liberty to enjoy sex. . . . With clothing, I can create a male gender presentation that leaves everyone feeling cozy in their either/or, male or female universe. Naked, I expose the lie of that binary myth. Naked, I make people uneasy, anxious. Naked, I undermine the dominant paradigm (FTM newsletter, 1996).

Showing and sharing one's transgender identity (through confrontational nude images) is a deconstructive (queer) tactic used by some transactivists. As Seidman (1997) explains, "Queers refuse the gesture of tolerance extended by straights—and accepted by the gay mainstream—which holds so long as gay people remain on the periphery and so long as they conform to a code of respectable sexual and gender behavior" (p. 193).

Through claims that everyone (even cheerleaders and football players) are transgender, claims that one can be neither gender and also both, and confrontational celebration of gender deviance, some transactivists turn the logic of "identity politics" on its head. Rather than striving to create an upstanding "transgender" identity that will provide "transgender rights" to escape "transgender oppression," transactivists employing deconstructive tactics frolic in the delight of their outsider status, advocate a life of remaining in-between, and refuse boundaries that could easily identify who is transgender and who is not. Importantly, this article has shown that both the logic of identity-building and identity-blurring played out in U.S. transactivism in the mid-1990s.

DISCUSSION: IDENTITY OR QUEER POLITICS?

U.S. transactivism in the last decade of the 20th century cannot be reduced to just another example of identity politics or simply the queer ingredient complicating gay/lesbian identity politics. As this article has illustrated, recent transactivism in the United States entailed both efforts to construct and deconstruct a transgender group identity. Processes of creating transgender group boundaries, articulating a transgender consciousness through understandings of transgender oppression and rights, and negotiating everyday expression of transgender identity all are means by which some types of transactivism assembled a notion of shared "transgender" group identity. By opening up the "transgender" umbrella to include anyone who does not do traditional masculinity/femininity, making claims to being neither gender and at the same time both, and reveling in the status of being deviant, transactivism also dismantled the very categories of identity (gender) by which a "transgender" identity politics could be organized. At heart, this article substantively shows that transactivisms in the United States during the mid-1990s were a

complex combination of *both* identity (collective identity construction) and queer (deconstructive) politics.

Theoretically, the simultaneity of identity and queer social movement processes in transactivism seem to challenge a growing assumption in (LGBTQ) gender/sexuality studies—the denouement of identity strategies. The story goes something like this: first there was identity politics, and that felt liberatory and wonderful until all those people in the margins complicated the unitary sense of identity and so, to challenge the limits of all the previous forms of exclusionary identity politics, a more complicated queer politics emerged, and things were much much better. Gender/sexuality studies tell this story by outlining how deconstructive processes in queer politics arise in response to the confines of identity politics (Stein, 1992; Wilson and Bristow, 1993), arguing that a queer politics of difference is replacing a flawed identity politics (Seidman, 1997), and asking whether identity politics must self destruct (Gamson, 1995). I worry that in LGBTQ gender/sexuality studies, we tend to read words like Seidman's (1997) where he explains that "queer theory and politics intend to expose and disturb the normalizing politics of identity as practiced in the straight and lesbian and gay mainstream" (p. 192) and assume that it signals the end of *any* identity strategies being employed in social movements today.

In fact, we are empirically seeing that it is actually the dual project of collective identity "deployment and pillaging" that increasingly characterizes gender/sexuality movements today (Gamson 1995, p. 599). Indeed, Gamson persuasively argues for the continued relevance of identity strategies when he asserts that "both the boundary-strippers and the boundary-defenders are right" (p. 597). Theoretically, LGBTQ scholars explain this complex interplay of identity and deconstruction by noting that we are caught in a "continual shuffling between the need for categories and the recognition of their incompleteness" (Phelan, 1994, p. 154). As Seidman (1997) reminds us, "identities are not only self-limiting and productive of hierarchies but are self-enabling and productive of social collectivities, moral bonds, and political agency" (p. 136). Clearly it appears that identity strategies remain relevant in today's socio-political context, especially in the United States.

In fact, social movement literature increasingly theorizes the centrality of identity. As Snow and McAdam (2000) argue, "One of the most central themes running through the literature on social movements during the past decade is the observation that identity is a pivotal concept in attempting to understand movement dynamics" (p. 41). Although many read work that details the construction of a shared group identity as indicating the formation of the worst form of identity politics, new social movement scholars remind us to keep the complexity in mind. First, Porta and Diani (1999) clarify that,

> In speaking of identity we are not referring to an autonomous object, nor to a property of social actors; we mean, rather, the process by which social actors recognize themselves— and are recognized by other actors—as part of broader groupings (p. 85).

Importantly, social movement scholars explain that the work of new social movement actors focus on the concept of collective identity as a social process, continually constructed (Porta and Diani, 1999; Melucci, 1996; Rupp and Taylor, 1999; Taylor and Whittier, 1992). Rupp and Taylor (1999), for example, remind us that "the concept of collective identity as it has been defined by scholars of social movements is not essentialist or apolitical. Rather it allows an understanding of . . . political identity that is continuously negotiated and revised" (p. 365). These social movement scholars make an important point for gender/sexuality studies: a politics centrally focused on identity can be more complex than exclusionary and dangerous mainstream (essentialist) identity politics. If we use a concept of identity politics that assumes an essentialist, core identity that spurs collective action, we must follow the logic of gender/sexuality research that suggests its beleaguered end. However, if we conceive of the identity in today's gender/sexuality movements as being constructed through collective action (thus continually negotiated and created), we can begin to understand how and why "identity work" remains central.

Returning to the substantive finding of this work—that U.S. transactivism of the mid-1990s was characterized by both constructions and deconstructions of a transgender group identity—we can theoretically understand this finding in all of its complexity if we see "identity" as continually (and complexly) negotiated in today's gender/sexuality movements. If we remain committed to a conceptualization of identity politics that assumes "natural" identity categories out of which a transgender politics emerges, the "identity work" of transactivism will appear far more unsophisticated than social movement literature and activists contend. Understanding the identity work of transactivism in terms of a continually-constructed sense of collective identity, we can begin to see that the constructions and deconstructions of transgender identity within transactivism may not be simply a battle between identity politics and queer politics. Rather, we must understand the *simultaneous* interplay of identity claims and deconstructions as part of the negotiation and revising of a complex political identity (Melucci, 1996; Phelan, 1994; Taylor and Rupp, 1999). In sum, the (de)constructions of identity in transactivism are processes by which a movement creates a specific, complex identity (of difference) in today's socio-political context that requires collective identity but also makes it consequential (Collins, 1998; Gamson, 1995; Phelan, 1994; Melucci, 1996).

GLB + T?

Although most gay/lesbian organizations in the United States today have added the B (bisexual) and T (transgender), it is important to realize that the equation is not a simple one. We might view the addition of the T to indicate that transgender politics is just another form of exclusionary identity politics being tacked onto mainstream gay/lesbian politics. We might also view the addition of

the T as symbolizing the queer turn, an extension of the "queer" umbrella. This article suggests, however, that the T (transgender politics) is not simply one or the other. T (transgender) politics is, at the same time, neither identity politics *nor* queer politics, and also both.

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